DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 547 HE 033 383

AUTHOR	Grossman, David M.
TITLE	Hidden Perils: Instructional Media and Higher Education. Occasional Paper.
INSTITUTION	National Univ. Continuing Education Association, Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NUCEA-OP-5
PUB DATE	1987-00-00
NOTE	16p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National University Continuing Education Association, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 420, Washington, DC 20036 ($2). Tel: 202-659-3130.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; College Faculty; Computer Uses in Education; *Distance Education; *Educational Media; *Educational Technology; Higher Education; *Multimedia Instruction; Quality Control; *Teacher Role; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses issues to consider when using instructional media in higher education. Section 1 highlights quality control, discussing such key questions as how accountability and responsibility for creating instruction are determined and what the faculty's role is in determining how courses are to be adapted and delivered. Section 2 discusses the trivialization of instruction, noting that adopting instructional media methods deprives faculty of creative roles in instruction. Section 3 discusses the resulting homogenization of instruction. Section 4 examines the timeliness factor, or the loss of dynamic elements in instruction when using this static form of delivery. Section 5 discusses curriculum control, noting the potential for administrative tyranny. Section 6 discusses effects on the institution and the faculty who create such courses. For example, an institution loses control over the product which carries its name and reputation, and faculty who participate in course development for technological delivery take a back seat to production and technical personnel. Section 7 explains how to offer quality off-campus students instruction via modern technology, noting that instruction will be of higher quality if distance learning programs and technologically delivered instruction allow faculty to achieve the full realization of their professional responsibilities. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

OCCASIONAL PAPER

ED 446 547

HIDDEN PERILS

Instructional Media and Higher Education

by David M. Grossman

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Kuhl

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HE 033383

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CONTINUING EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

HIDDEN PERILS: INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA AND HIGHER EDUCATION

by David M. Grossman

National University
Continuing Education Association

Occasional Paper 5

The author wishes to acknowledge the
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools,
which provided the original forum for the
presentation of this address.

©1987 National University Continuing Education Association
Printed in the United States of America

Hidden Perils: Instructional Media and Higher Education

Letters and brochures offering complete television courses arrive at our university every month. Offers come from producing consortia, and we are solicited by would-be national broadcast networks of education providers asking us to provide local credit and a local connection for their programs and courses.

Not infrequently, we receive letters such as this: "While the topic as shown by recent polls is of great interest to most Americans, our funding agency, in order to fund us, will need to be convinced that sizable numbers of distance learners will sign up for credit. It would be extremely helpful to have a strong letter of support from you, as one of the chief users of course television. I am not asking for a specific commitment, but a general statement indicating how popular you feel the course might be with your faculty and students, whether or not you feel you would use it, and other uses you might see for the materials (use in classrooms, in media learning centers, community libraries, etc.)."

Such entreaties are entirely understandable given the enormous costs of delivering collegiate instruction through the media. For each course, such costs are $15,000 for correspondence, $25,000–$200,000 for radio, $30,000 to $3 million for television, and $100,000 to $500,000 for computer-assisted instruction. Agencies funding course development want to encourage widespread use to justify their support. Institutions pro-

ducing such instruction on their own want to amortize the cost through leasing and sales of instruction to other institutions. To commercial vendors, course adoptions are the avenue to profit. In fact, a whole new industry is coming of age, the course-ware industry.

After 40 years of growth, telecommunication-assisted learning now has the potential to make a significant impact on higher education. New forms of media delivery and low-cost telecommunication technology, combined with the traditional forms of broadcast television and radio, now make the contemporary university available beyond the confines of the campus. In addition to the increasing variety of hardware available in the delivery of instruction to the distance-enrolled student, there has been a proliferation of instructional materials and college credit-bearing courses. Many institutions of higher learning are now seriously considering investing or reinvesting in technology delivery systems, or are adapting these externally produced courses and materials for their own curricular offerings.

The Issue of Quality Control

As universities and colleges embark on this activity, the same quality control issues that attended previous efforts in distance and off-campus education will arise anew. The solutions to these questions and problems are by no means clear, but are not unattainable either. Some key questions include:

(1) How are accountability and responsibility for the complex effort of creating instruction to be determined?

(2) How is it decided, and who decides, whether to incorporate externally produced courses in the college curriculum?

(3) What is the role of faculty, collectively and individually, in determining how courses are to be adapted and delivered to students?

(4) Can courses produced for nationwide use adequately reflect the offering institution and its faculty which, by their very nature, are particular and local?

(5) What are the effects of an ever-growing number of media-delivered courses on the campus, and on traditional instruction in particular?

Each of these questions suggests a family of related issues and topics, issues that go to the heart of any institutional concern with instruction, no matter where or how it is offered.

These issues deal primarily with the development and use of externally produced courses. Other concerns include the environment in which the learning occurs, library and laboratory access, student control over when and where learning takes place, and counting seat-time and contact hours as measures of quality. This analysis looks only at why such courses are questionable and how they in fact affect the quality and mission of the institutions which employ them.

There is a certain attraction in externally produced instructional materials and courses. They are invariably slick, well-produced, attractive, and inexpensive—inexpensive in the sense that an institution can rent, lease, or somehow employ them at a fraction of the cost of developing such an offering by itself. In many cases, they are of extraordinary quality and may be superior to a college's or university's on-campus conventional courses. Faculty at a particular institution are asked to review the materials—an entire course package—for acceptability, add or delete material as deemed appropriate, and on acceptance, then offer it for credit and grade the student's required assignments.

Trivialization of Instruction

The consideration and offering of such courses has some curious consequences, because the process of adoption in effect demands the separation of instructional development from dissemination. It requires participating faculty to change roles, from being creators of instruction to managers of resources and students, and to disseminate the views of

someone else. The adoption process deprives faculty of a truly creative role in instruction. It is unfortunate that many institutions already draw a sharp dichotomy between research and instruction, ignoring the symbiotic, synergistic relationship between the two. To divide further the gap between development and dissemination does even greater damage. If these offerings are considered only for students at a distance, second-class status is immediately conferred, and if these courses are incorporated fully into the curriculum, they often do significant injury to the instructional mission of any institution of higher learning.

There are, of course, faculty who would leap to employ such courses. For those accustomed to using media in the classroom, these courses are often seen as mere extensions of the use of audio/visual materials. The course package may be perceived as equivalent to the choice of a text, but that parallel is quite misleading. Faculty underestimate the power of the medium and means of delivery. The faculty member who thinks his voice will dominate the message conveyed to students is sadly mistaken. That voice lies submerged, and it is the media course package that uses the professor, rather than the other way around.

For faculty members tired of teaching introductory courses for which there is a set formula, or courses in which there is little opportunity to employ creative energies, and for those faculty wishing to concentrate on research exclusively, such courses apparently are a boon. This facilitates the trivialization of instruction precisely because it frees faculty from their perceived burdens, deflecting attention even further from the instructional mission. The fact is that instruction is a creative, dynamic process which has an impact upon the life of the mind and the research of any faculty member. Removing productive faculty from the processes of instruction is to diminish the quality of the instructional enterprise of the institution. This, perhaps, idealizes the role of faculty and the centrality of instruction at the modern university. Huge classes, anonymous education, yellowing and fraying lecture notes, and inaccessible faculty are all too common at many institutions. Nonetheless, it is better to move toward the ideal then to step further away. From this perspective, the adoption of course packages, supplemented or not, is a step backward.

Homogenization of Instruction

Another curious and potentially dangerous result of such courses is the homogenization of instruction. As we do not have a national university, so we do not have national courses, at least not yet. In most disciplines, there is little agreement as to what constitutes course content, and even in those disciplines, such as biology, chemistry, and physics, where there has been agreement and some degree of standardization, there is considerable internal discussion as to the content and methodology of both introductory and advanced courses. Instruction is particular and unique to the faculty member who develops and offers it, and to the institution which provides the credit. Our system of higher education thrives on the diversity and competition in the higher learning enterprise, and such national courses are stultifying to faculty, to institutions, and to the entire higher education system. Far from decrying and attempting to eliminate the instructional equivalent of endless reinvention of the wheel, we should be celebrating and energizing that diversity which comes from the opportunities that universities and colleges afford their faculty in developing instruction.

Timeliness Factor

Another consequence of the production and adoption of such courses is the loss of a dynamic element in college courses offered through technology. Technological delivery, be it by video, audio, or computer, fixes instruction at a particular moment in time. To revise these courses, or to change them, often requires a considerable investment of time and money in what is already an extremely expensive enterprise. The tendency on the part of producers is to design courses with a long shelf life, to minimize additional investments as long as possible. Quality instruction, on the other hand, is ever changing from lecture to lecture and from semester to semester, and continues to reflect the changing minds of the faculty members, the changing disciplines, and the changing world. The irony, of course, is that media and technology are per-

ceived as dynamic, when in fact they are the opposite and, thus, most of the dynamic elements in instruction are lost as one proceeds to the static form of delivery.

Curriculum Control

Course producers in this new industry write to the deans of continuing education and to other collegiate units because they often believe these deans have the power to offer courses and to control their content. In effect, this lets the nose of the administrative camel into the curricular tent of university faculty, allowing administrators a hand in determining curriculum. The potential for administrative tyranny certainly exists. An administrator could well say to faculty that since he can acquire courses less expensively than they can be developed by in-house faculty, he would prefer to use an external product. If the administrator has access to adjunct faculty, he could employ them to teach such courses and give them as much latitude as he desired. The administrator can now inflict what has been externally developed on the faculty, either resident or adjunct. The illusion of faculty participation and control can be created by allowing minor changes in the course package, or by engaging particularly enthusiastic or hungry faculty (adjunct or residential) to offer these courses. For those institutions already administratively driven, external courses are a powerful tool in the hands of those only tangentially concerned with curriculum.

Implications for the Creating Institution

In addition to the impact of these external courses on adopting institutions and their faculty, the effects on the institution and faculty who create such courses are equally questionable. Courses produced with a national audience in mind are not necessarily reflective of the faculty member or the committee of faculty members responsible for the course, because they are produced for the consumer—in this case, institutions around the country. Since course authors are producing a text for the

widest possible market, this may mean producing a product for the lowest common denominator in the marketplace. Or, the product may be designed to be the least offensive to all; in short, a bland representation of the subject at hand. Education produced with the primary objective of satisfying the consumer, be it institution or individual, cannot meet the criteria for quality instruction.

Additionally, the producing institution loses control over the product which carries its name and reputation. The use or misuse of these courses is simply beyond control, yet the producing institution risks its name by being so closely identified with the educational experience provided to the public. In effect, a producing institution wanders into the marketplace at grave peril to its reputation and its intellectual integrity.

There are other developers of collegiate courses at work in this new industry. Commercial vendors, public broadcast stations, professional associations, and media producers are now all vying for funds. Participating faculty are rented more often than not, and university affiliation is often more apparent than real as these producers attempt to obtain credit and credibility for such offerings. Additionally, institutions lend their name and faculties to develop courses that they would never consider using on their own campuses, but have no difficulty in suggesting and indeed urging that other and lesser institutions adopt and offer them.

Faculty who embark upon course development for technological delivery are often in for a rude awakening. They find that they are submerged in the course development process, taking a back seat to production and technical personnel. Faculty are relegated to the role of content consultant while the media course takes on a life of its own. With considerable investment and risk, the funding agency or media producers take charge, leaving the faculty member identified in name with the course, but in fact, only an adjunct to its development. As is often the case, faculty naturally defer to the media people who are expert in the production processes, with the result that with the increasing erosion of faculty authority, the course is no longer reflective of the faculty minds.

Doing it Right

It is possible to offer off-campus students quality instruction delivered through modern technology. First, universities and colleges should develop courses and programs which employ their own faculty. They must be prepared to spend lavishly for the hardware, for the technical support, for production personnel, and for faculty rewards in the development of such programs.

Concerns of cost effectiveness must be set aside, for there is no way that such programs and the additional costs they incur can be recovered. College instruction, whether offered through technology or delivered in the conventional fashion, is an expensive proposition. If the institution of higher learning cannot afford the costs of developing a first class course, it should not do it. There are no quick fixes, there are no easy buy-ins so that an institution may serve a heretofore unserved population. Ultimately, a gerry-built program to tap a new student market with courses from anywhere and everywhere will work to the discredit of the institution.

Second, agencies providing funds for media course development should disregard the numbers of students enrolled or numbers of institutions adopting the courses which have been funded. Instead of attempting to create national courses, agencies must support the development of courses specific to the developing and offering institutions, and fund model programs of course development which may be replicated at other institutions around the country—even while accepting that there is little likelihood innovation will quickly spread through the institutional world of higher education. Funding agencies can support schools and universities which may have the equipment for technological course development and delivery but lack the operating funds to use it. Such support should not be tied to the generation of course packages and materials which must meet with national acceptance. Finally, support should be given only to course development in which faculty play a major and genuine role in the conceptualization, development, and articulation of instruction.

Development of courses employing technology must engage faculty and afford them all the professional latitude and prerogatives that they would have on campus in the classroom. That which is produced belongs to the faculty member—not to a committee, not to the person holding the camera or the mike, not to the scriptwriter or editor. The faculty member's professional reputation is on the line with such a public demonstration of his intellect. The course is his, with rights of authorship and control. He is not the content consultant, but rather the professor, and the person in charge. To have all this responsibility means that the particular faculty member must have the requisite authority, and should the end product not be satisfactory, the program should be scrapped. The number of hours of instruction, and the number and nature of the assignments, are the prerogative of the professor, not to be foreordained by some formula.

The development of technologically delivered instruction is highly complex, and it is difficult to compensate faculty adequately (either through overload or as part of regular assignment) for the time and intellectual effort necessary to develop a quality offering. Institutional rewards and recognition are essential elements in the development of quality programs, and this should be articulated at the outset of any project. Technologically delivered instruction affords the public with a window on university instruction, something which is otherwise unavailable. In addition, it also affords faculty, peers, and colleagues a glimpse of the professional performance of the particular faculty member. This, of course, is a sensitive area, because that open window almost invites questioning that can border upon infringement of academic freedom. But this is an opportunity as well. Public and peer review is a great incentive in the development of quality and argues even more for the faculty member to be in command of the production process.

Finally, quality instruction through this means requires that such courses be considered the same as, and not different in any way from, conventionally offered courses. Thinking makes it so. Courses which are differentiated on the basis of how and where instruction is delivered are by their very nature second class. These distinctions establish differences in the minds of faculty and students. Particularly for faculty, those

differences often translate into lowered expectations of student performance and their own performance as professional scholars and teachers. Charged with developing courses that are equal to those offered on campus in conventional fashion, faculty will be intellectually inventive and develop programs and courses which will reflect the best of their work and their institution.

In short, instruction will be of high quality to the extent that distance-learning programs and technologically delivered instruction allow the faculty to profess, to achieve the full realization of their professional responsibilities. To the extent that technology and distance learning compromises that professionalism and subverts the role of faculty, then no standard measure of quality will have any meaning. As we tell our students, what you get out of college depends on what you put into it; so too is the quality of instruction dependent upon the investment of both institutions and individuals. To the extent that an institution's faculty is not involved in the processes of instruction and surveillance of quality control, long-distance education technologically delivered will be neither an integral part of the institution nor an accurate representation of the institution to its public constituency.

David M. Grossman

David Grossman is an expert in the field of educational telecommunications and distance education. He holds a Ph.D. in American history from Washington University in St. Louis, and has taught at The University of Maryland, Northern Illinois University, and Washington University. Currently, he directs the University of Minnesota's Independent Study Program, which provides collegiate instruction through correspondence, broadcast television and radio, video and audio cassette, and computer to more than 9,000 students annually.

NUCEA Occasional Papers

In 1984, the National University Continuing Education Association initiated an occasional paper series to provide useful information and stimulate thinking about important issues in continuing higher education. The booklets in this series are of two types: position papers which present the point of view adopted by NUCEA on a given topic, and essays on subjects of interest to the field of continuing education by recognized experts in higher education. Titles in this series include:

1— **The Role of Colleges and Universities in Continuing Professional Education**
Philip Nowlen and Donna Queeney

2— **Tradition, Transformation, and Tomorrow: The Emerging Role of American Higher Education**
Howard Sparks

3— **Colleges and Universities Respond to Changing National Priorities**
John Brademas

4— **Forging New Relationships Between the Academy and the Community**
George W. Johnson

5— **Hidden Perils: Instructional Media and Higher Education**
David M. Grossman

The price for single copies of the above booklets, including postage and handling, is $2.00 prepaid. Bulk discounts are available on orders of six or more of a single title. Order from the Publications Department, National University Continuing Education Association, One Dupont Circle, Suite 420, Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 659-3130.

nucea

National University Continuing Education Association
One Dupont Circle, Suite 420, Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 659-3130

BEST COPY AVAILABLE